

# BUSINESS EDUCATION COMPACT

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS



## Informational Interviews: Why Do them?

*One out of every 200 resumes = job offer*

*One out of every 12 informational interviews = job offer*

- Opportunity to “try on jobs” to see if they fit
- Opportunity to screen before accepting a position
- **BEST WAY** to learn ***WHAT YOU REALLY WANT IN A CAREER***



## Informational Interviews: Why Do them?

- Explore careers and clarify your career goal
- Expand your professional network
- Build confidence for your job interviews
- Access the most up-to-date career information
- Identify your professional strengths and weaknesses



## Purpose of Informational Interviews:

- Finding information you need to:
  - *Choose or refine a career path*
  - *Learn how to break in*
  - *Find if you have what it takes to succeed*
- Process of spending time with one of your network contacts in focused conversation that provides you with key information to launch or boost your career.



## Potential Results of Informational Interviews:

- Obtain Information about:
  - *Career field*
  - *Skills required for the job*
  - *How you might fit into different work settings*
- Gain perspective of work
- Greater flexibility in planning options
- Make personal contacts

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## Potential Results of Informational Interviews:

- Gain insight into hidden job market
- Become aware of:
  - *Needs of employer*
  - *Realities of employment*
- Gain confidence in talking with people
- Exposure to variety of jobs and personalities of companies
- Learn where you might fit into an organization

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# Informational Interviews: Where to start?

- **Step 1:** Identify occupation(s) for informational interviews
- **Step 2:** Identify people to interview
- **Step 3:** Schedule the informational interview
- **Step 4:** Prepare for the informational interview
- **Step 5:** Dress for the informational interview
- **Step 6:** Conduct the informational interview
- **Step 7:** Follow up after the informational interview



## Step 1: Identify occupation(s) for informational interviews

- Identify one or more occupations to investigate
- Assess your:
  - *Interests*
  - *Abilities*
  - *Values*
  - *Skills*
- Evaluate labor conditions and trends
- Read all you can about the field and the organization before the interview
- Decide what information you want to obtain
- Prepare a list of questions



## Step 2: Identify people to interview

- Start with list of people you already know:
  - *Friends*
  - *Fellow students*
  - *Present or former co-workers*
  - *Supervisors*
  - *Neighbors*
- Other good resources:
  - *Professional organizations*
    - *Call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title*
  - *Organizational directories*

**Remember: People like to help students out with job information!**



## Step 3: Schedule the informational interview

*Contact the person to be interviewed by*

TELEPHONE

OR

LETTER



- Be flexible in your scheduling
- Ask for convenient time to call back and schedule an appointment
- Choose that the interview be at their workplace (if you can)

- Typed or printed neatly
- Include:
  - *Brief introduction*
  - *Why you are writing*
  - *Brief statement of your interests/experiences in their field, organization or location*
  - *Why you would like to talk (seeking information and advice)*
  - *Last paragraph – include sentence about how and when you will follow up*

**HINT: Prepare for 20-30 minutes MAXIMUM for informational interviews!**



# EXAMPLES: Scheduling by Phone

## Examples:

- *“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I’m conducting career research in your field. I would like to meet and talk with you for about 30 minutes so that I can find out more about your field of expertise.”*
- *“Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m a student at \_\_\_\_\_. I got your name from \_\_\_\_\_. You’re in a line of work that I’m interested in, and I was hoping that you could help me gain insights into the profession. I’m sure that my questions could be answered in a 20-30 minute informational interview.”*

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# EXAMPLE: Scheduling by Letter

September 15, 2007

Mark Steppe, Esq.  
Vavilov, Webb Walsh and River  
1313 Avenue of the Harbors  
Silver City, CA 12345

Dear Mr. Steppe:

I am a student at the California Western School of Law, beginning my third trimester. Labor law has been of interest to me since I took a class in that subject as an undergraduate. Your firm has an outstanding reputation in that field of practice.

My area of concentration in law school will be labor law. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you briefly and discuss the practice of your specialty. I am especially interested in your views regarding public vs. private employment experience. Any further insights you have would be greatly appreciated.

I will contact your office the week of October 2 to set up a mutually convenient time for this informational meeting.

Sincerely,

John Doe

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## Step 4:

### Prepare for the informational interview

- **Research the COMPANY**
  - *Enhance the quality of your interview*
  - *You'll ask more intelligent and relevant questions*
  - *Don't ask questions that could easily have been answered*
- **How To Do It:**
  - *Determine type of information you want*
    - *General company information like: products and services, history, corporate culture, mission and goals, financial statistics, organizational structure, locations, etc.*
    - *Employment issues like: career paths and advancement opportunities, benefits, diversity initiatives, etc.*
  - *Go to company's website*
  - *Check company annual reports*
  - *Request and look over other company literature*

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## Step 4:

### Prepare for the informational interview

- **Research the INDUSTRY**
  - *Discover the competitive nature of the industry*
  - *Able to spot trends that your interviewer is dealing with*
- **How To Do It:**
  - *Print source:*
    - *U.S. Industrial Outlook*
  - *Web sources:*
    - *Competia Express*
    - *IndustryLink*
    - *Industry Portals*

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## Step 4:

### Prepare for the informational interview

#### Develop QUESTIONS

- *“What is your job like?”*
- *“What is a typical day like for you?”*
- *“What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?”*
- *“What kinds of problems do you deal with?”*
- *“What kinds of decisions do you make?”*
- *“What percentage of your time is spent doing what?”*
- *“How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?”*
- *“How did you get your job?”*
- *“What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?”*
- *“Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?”*



## Step 4:

### Prepare for the informational interview

#### Develop QUESTIONS

- *“What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation?”*
- *“What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging?”*
- *What do you like and not like about working in this industry?”*
- *“What things did you do before you entered this occupation?”*
- *“What are the various jobs in this field or organization?”*
- *“What do you like most about this company?”*
- *“Are you optimistic about the company’s future and your future with the company?”*
- *“What does the company do to contribute to its employees’ professional development?”*



## Step 4: Prepare for the informational interview

### Develop QUESTIONS

- *“What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?”*
- *“How does a person progress in your field?”*
- *“What is a typical career path in this field or organization?”*
- *“What is the best way to enter this occupation?”*
- *“What were the keys to your career advancement?”*
- *“What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?”*
- *“What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job?”*
- *“How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?”*



## Step 4: Prepare for the informational interview

### Develop QUESTIONS

- *“What can you tell me about the corporate culture?”*
- *“If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?”*
- *“With the information you have about my education, skills and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?”*
- *“How is the economy affecting this industry?”*
- *“How has your job affected your lifestyle?”*
- *“What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?”*
- *“What are the major frustrations of this job?”*
- *“What are the educational requirements for this job?”*
- *“Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?”*



## Step 4:

### Prepare for the informational interview

#### Develop QUESTIONS

- *“If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?”*
- *“How did you prepare for this work?”*
- *“If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?”*
- *“What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions?”*
- *“What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?”*
- *“Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?”*
- *“Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job?”*

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## Step 4:

### Prepare for the informational interview

#### Develop QUESTIONS

- *“What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?”*
- *“What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?”*
- *“These are my strongest assets (skills, areas of knowledge, personality traits and values): \_\_\_\_\_. Where would they fit in this field?”*
- *“How would you assess the experience I’ve had so far in terms of entering this field?”*

**HINT!: Only choose around 12 questions to ask during your 20-30 minute interview!**

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## Step 5:

### Dress for the informational interview

- **Dress like you were going to a formal job interview!**
  - *Refer to the BEC's Dress for Success presentation for tips!*



## Step 6:

### Conduct the informational interview

- **Day Before:**
  - *Call to confirm your appointment*
  - *If you have questions about the location – ASK!*
  - *Plan to arrive 10 minutes early for your interview*
- **Day Of:**
  - *Arrive 10 minutes early*
  - *Carry a small notebook and pen*
  - *Be polite and professional*
  - *Refer to your list of prepared questions*
  - *Stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion*



## Step 6:

### Conduct the informational interview

- **During the Interview:**
  - *Share information about you but **DO NOT** dominate the interview by talking about yourself*
  - *Be a **GOOD LISTENER!***
  - *Ask for referrals of others who might be helpful to you*
  - *Ask permission to use your interviewee's name when contacting these new contacts*

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## Step 7:

### Follow up after the informational interview

- **Send a THANK YOU note!**
  - *Send within one to three days after the interview*
  - *Effective way to keep in touch*
  - *Way to be **REMEMBERED***
  - *Let them know they were helpful*
  - *Thank them for the time spent*
  - *Nice Touch:*
    - *Quote something that they said back to them, word for word*
  - *Ask them to keep you in mind*
    - *For information to help you in career research*
  - *Include your address and phone number under your signature!*

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## Step 7:

### Follow up after the informational interview

- Record, Analyze and Evaluate the interview
  - *Keep a list of people you have interviewed or plan to interview*
  - *Keep notebook or cards with interview notes*
  - *Document main things you gained from each interview*
  - *Ask yourself the following questions:*
    - *What did I learn from this interview?*
    - *How does what I learned fit with my own interests, abilities, goals, values, etc.?*
    - *What do I still need to know?*
    - *What plan of action can I make?*



## Final Hints!

- If you ask for 20-30 minutes of a person's time **STICK TO THE LIMIT!**
- Take all information given with a grain of salt
  - *Don't settle for just one or two interviews about a given area of work; a broad information base is essential*
- Avoid impressions about an area of work based solely on whether the person interviewed was likeable or the surroundings attractive
- Ask what you want to know but really let the person talk
  - *You might discover and acquire information about unanticipated areas of employment*



# Final Hints!

- Don't ignore personal feelings
  - *What you naturally gravitate toward or away from is very important!*
- Find out if the interviewee has any insight on qualifications necessary for a position such as the one you are discussing
- Chat with people casually at any opportunity
  - *Most people enjoy talking about their work*
  - *Curiosity can open many doors!*



# QUESTIONS?

**BEC Contacts:**

**Leslie Ewen**

**Student Services Program Specialist**

503-646-0242 ext. 29

Lewen@becpdx.org

